



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE JEST OF A LITERARY FORGER

The practice of feigned authorship is as frequently the result of intense vanity as it is the outcome of excessive modesty. Many a writer has hidden behind the mask of an unknown or falsely ascribed authorship that the greater glory might be his when, the concealment having been put aside and the mask thrown off, he might come forward to claim the reward of praise for his work and to obtain the larger reputation added by the mystery of the authorship. Be anonymous authorship the casting away of glory, the crafty deception for earning a greater fame, or merely the desire to amaze and perplex, it has been practiced in every age of the world's literature. How many individual poets have been content to remain unnamed behind the comprehensive Homer? In the Middle Ages, when authorship was largely communal, the production of a narrative of the Trojan war which was popular with that age on account of its presenting the Trojan side of the struggle in contrast to Homer's prejudiced point of view was ascribed to one Dares Phrygius. Behind this fabulous person some unknown writer has forever hidden his name. The purpose of such a work usually demanded, too, that the manuscript be found in a mysterious manner. Mystification of literary sources, a harmless propensity to dupe the reader, was, in fact, a common convention of mediæval literature. All the researches of learned and zealous students have never discovered Chaucer's mysterious "myn auctor called Lollius." One readily agrees with the statement of Burton in his *Bookhunter*:—

I believe that if one of those laborious old writers hatched a good idea of his own, he could experience no peace of mind until he found it legitimated by having passed through an earlier brain, and that the author who failed thus to establish a paternity for his thought would sometimes audaciously set down some great name in his crowded margins, in the hope that the imposition might pass undiscovered.

"The gentle Spenser, fancy's pleasing son," sent his "little Booke" to Master Philip Sidney under the cover of "Immerto";

while his busy-body friend "E. K." has obtained a sort of puzzle-fame by writing a Glosse to the *Shepherd's Calendar* under a concealed identity. The question is not infrequently asked whether an eminent judge of Elizabeth's day masked himself,—imperfectly to some behind the face of cryptography,—in the lowly guise of an "imperfect actor on the stage." In this same age it was the worst of bad taste for a sonnet-cycle writer to offer the public more than his initials.

It was to the English world of the second half of the eighteenth century, however, that the fascination of a false ascription of authorship, the temptation for passing off a modern composition as an antique work, appealed with peculiar charm. This is but the appearance in the realm of literary composition of the growing tendency of the day to take an earnest interest in "the reproduction in modern art or literature of the life and thought of the Middle Ages,"—which is Professor Beers's definition of Romanticism. The poems of Ossian, the *Castle of Otranto*, the tragedy of Chatterton, the innumerable ballad forgeries, the immortal hoax of Ireland, impress us thoroughly with the fact that this was, indeed, the golden age of literary forgery.

MacPherson had found his Ossian poems preserved in the memories of the old people of the Highlands and had translated them from the Gaelic into a kind of eighteenth century Biblical English. Horace Walpole had published the *Castle of Otranto* in 1764 with this account of its origin: "The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. . . . How much sooner it was written does not appear . . ." In the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliffe's church in Bristol the wonderful boy Chatterton had dug from Master Cannynge's coffer a quantity of fifteenth century manuscripts containing the poetry of a Middle English poet previously unknown to the world. Bishop Percy had discovered his folio manuscript of ballads "lying dirty on the floor under a bureau in ye Parlour, being used by the maids to light the fire."

These essays towards deception in authorship were for the most part clever enough completely to mystify and largely to

take in the reading public of an age that was unenlightened in regard to the language and literature of the earlier periods of its history. They do not testify to a literary moral conscience necessarily any lower than that of our own day so much as they do to an unrestrained eagerness to antiquate. The only apology considered necessary by Walpole for the fraud he had committed in the preface to the first edition of his romance was this acknowledgment in the second edition, after the success of the book had been assured: "It is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. As diffidence of his own abilities and the novelty of the attempt were the sole inducements to assume the disguise, he flatters himself that he shall appear excusable." The general feeling of the time toward the practice is, perhaps, well expressed by Sir Walter Scott in the introduction to the *Border Minstrelsy*. "There is no small degree of cant in the violent invectives with which impostures of this nature have been assailed. If a young author wishes to circulate a beautiful poem under the guise of antiquity, the public is surely more enriched by the contribution than injured by the deception." Walpole, who came not off from the Chatterton controversy with flying colors, expressed the same opinion in his more dandified way: "It is not a grave crime in a young bard to have forged false notes of hand that were to pass current only in the parish of Parnassus."

In 1782, twelve years after the sensational death of the tragic representative of the literary forgers, the controversy concerning the authenticity of the poems that Chatterton had ascribed to one Rowley, a monk of the fifteenth century, was at its highest pitch. A wordy war of pamphlets, which were full of acrimonious personal bickering and filled with a mass of pseudo-learning, was fiercely raging. More interesting to us than are these pamphlets is the refusal of one writer in the bloodless fray to join the battle on this level. One Scotchman¹

¹The Prophecy of Queen Emma, an ancient ballad, lately discovered, written by Johannes Turgattus, Prior of Durham, in the reign of William Rufus; to which is added, by the editor, an account of the discovery and hints towards a vindication of the authenticity of the poems of Ossian and Rowley. London. 1782. 8vo.

of that day has left printed evidence of the fact that he had a sufficient sense of the ridiculous to perceive that those who by disposition and temperament believed in old chests, floating bottles, and the memories of peasants as depositories of old literature would be convinced of the contrary by no arguments based on language, style, or custom. He saw, on the other hand, that the ill-naturedly critical Ritson and his sort would never believe that any manuscript had ever been found in an old chest. In consequence of his wider vision, William Junius Mickle set out to satirize the whole tendency toward false antiquarianism. Mickle's persiflant pamphlet, which did much toward settling the problems of Ossian and Chatterton, is crafty in its ridicule and cunning in its travesty of *bric-à-brac* Mediævalism,—all excellently sustained under the show of the greatest seriousness. The burlesque was not successful enough to drive the knight-errantry of literary deception out of the land, but in its smaller sphere *The Prophecy of Queen Emma* was as fitted for its purpose as was the great Spanish mockery of "ladies dead and lovely knights."

Mickle was by no means the worst of the large company of minor poets of the eighteenth century. If the beautifully simple song, "There's na'e luck about the hoose," be his, his rank is high. Unfortunately for his fame, the doubt raised as to the authorship has not been resolved in his favor. Mickle's talents were put under the stern handicap of a long continued financial distress. While trying to carry on in Edinburgh the business of brewer, inherited from his father, he lost more money than he could pay. His business failure was largely due to the more serious attention that he paid to study and writing. "He had already contracted the habits of literary life," is Chalmers' expression. Curiously enough, somewhat late in life, after he had set up as a literary man and had endured many hardships, he gained a handsome competence in acting as joint agent for the disposition of prizes of war gained by a squadron under his friend, Admiral Johnstone, to whom Mickle had sailed as secretary.

Although Mickle wrote a conventional tragedy,—refused by all the managers,—and employed the heroic couplet in his more

serious poems, he is, nevertheless, to be counted among those who saw from afar the rising sun of Romanticism. In some ways his *The Concubine*, called *Sir Martyn* in the second edition of 1778, is the most successful Spenserian imitation of the period. In 1782 he published an edition of Pearche's *Collection of Poems*, including in it his own *Hengist and May* and *Mary Queen of Scots*. His best ballad, *Cumnor Hall*, highly praised by Sir Walter Scott, appeared in Evans's *Old Ballads* (1777-1784).

The bolt of Mickle's ridicule in *The Prophecy of Queen Emma* did not strike its aim in every case. Mr. Chalmers in his *Life of Mickle* says of it: "In 1782, our poet published *The Prophecy of Queen Emma*, a ballad, with an ironical preface containing an account of its pretended author and discovery, and hints for vindicating the authenticity of the poems of Ossian and Rowley. This irony, however, lost part of its effect by the author's pretending that a poem which is modern both in language and in versification was the production of a prior of Durham in the reign of William Rufus, although he endeavors to account for this with some degree of humor, and is not unsuccessful in imitating the mode of reasoning adopted by dean Miles and Mr. Bryant, in the case of Chatterton." The ballad of *Queen Emma* is, indeed, "modern in both language and versification." A stanza or two will show Chalmers' statement to be true in this particular:—

O'er the hills of Cheviot beaming
 Rose the silver dawn of May;
 Hostile spears and helmets gleaming
 Swelled along the mountain gray.

Edwin's warlike horn resounded
 Through the winding dales below,
 And the echoing hills rebounded
 The defiance of the foe.

O'er the downs like torrents pouring
 Edwin's horsemen rushed along,
 From the hills like tempests luring
 Slowly marched stern Edgar's throng.

The declamation of *Queen Emma*, in this sophisticated pseudo-ballad form, is hurled upon her warring sons for some thirty-five verses. Even when

In her purple bosom quivering
Deep a feathered arrow stood,

the Queen continues to prophesy that

Soon the Dane, the Scott, and Norman
O'er your dales shall havoc pour,
Every hold and city storming,
Every herd and field devour.

The delightful, subtle irony of the reasons that Mickle gave in the "Postscript by the Editor" for setting forth the ballad in modern dress is partly missed by the editor of *The Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper*,—and perhaps by many another. Mickle excuses himself for the modern face of his ballad in this wonderfully clever piece of bantering:—

As to the modern orthography of the foregoing Ballad, nothing can be more easily accounted for. The fortunate Discoverer showed the MS. in the genuine character and orthography of the reign of William Rufus to the Editor and many other friends; but going on a rather sudden resolution on his journey to Lapland he took it along with him, to compare it with the MSS. of that country and of Iceland; and it is on the entreaty of his friends, since his departure that he sent the foregoing copy for publication, which he not only reduced to modern orthography, but has also struck out several unintelligible words, which none but those who have dived into some obsolete dictionary can understand; urging these reasons for so doing, that to print a modern poem in old spelling, no more makes it an old poem than one's going to Westminster Abbey, and putting General Monk's cap on his head, would make him General Monk; and that if an obsolete dictionary, which contained the same set of uncouth words which he had struck out, should happen to be found, it would afford a handle to doubt its authenticity, as nothing is easier than to stick old words into a poem, . . . nothing is easier than to string together all the hard words of King Alfred's days. . . . And certainly our friend argued very judiciously in stripping his MS. of hard old words, and other appearances so easily assumed, and of such suspicious countenance when they chance to be detected.

The "editor" had become possessed of the *Prophecy* from "a very ingenious and learned Antiquarian, very zealous for his researches for lost literature," who was at that moment "on his

travels through Lapland on purpose to discover proofs of the authenticity of his favorite Ossian." In that land he had "found a copy of Ossian's poems, in the handwriting of one of his own sons, preserved in the archives of the College of Bards,"—an institution of learning that Mickle found in Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*. The manuscript of the *Prophecy* this ingenious and learned Antiquarian had discovered under wonderful circumstances, the account of which is capital burlesque of old chest-literature:—

About three years ago, as the learned Gentleman was searching for antiquities in the cathedral of Durham, he observed a heap of boards and other rubbish in a corner of the belfry; and next day, having procured leave from the bishop to remove it, he brought two workmen with him and in about two hours they came to an old chest of Norway oak at the bottom of the heap. Great was the joy at this discovery, but, alas! on opening it, it contained only a few hoods and surplices,—not one MS. which was the principal object of the search. . . . During the night after this adventure, he could hardly sleep; but in the morning he dreamed of an old chest, which contained, in a double bottom, a great deal of ancient coin. Of this he took no notice for the present; but still old chests with false bottoms, and heaps of most curious coin, haunted his dreams; till on the third morning, he resolved once more to examine the chest in the belfry. But cruel disappointment still followed him;—the chest, on cutting it up, had no false bottom at all. In the rage of this distress, he seized the carpenter's axe, and so violently struck the lid, using indeed some rash words, that he fairly split it in two. And now the treasure appeared:—a fair MS. in good preservation. And while our Antiquarian hugged it, and kissed it for joy, the carpenter wisely observed, there was no wonder it was found in a double lid, for that dreams are always contrary!

In order not to fall into the distressful plight in which MacPherson and Chatterton found themselves on being required to produce their original manuscripts, the "editor" wisely forestalled the demands of impudent critics who might ask for the original writing. "The pseudo-critics, whom we have already described as haters of discovered poetry, will no doubt endeavor at least to pick holes in the above narrative." His previous

description of them had been this: "Though the most sagacious and learned class of critics are, at first glance, most pleasingly convinced of the authenticity of poems and MSS. claiming an ancient date, yet there are a sort of ignorant pedants who delight at cavilling at what they can never refute, and who bear a particular enmity to the restorers of long lost poetry." These ignorant pedants he warns not to insist too strongly upon the production of the original manuscript. "The public are hereby advertised, that the learned Gentleman now in Lapland is very testy in his disposition, and of all things cannot bear to have the authenticity of his MS. called in question."

No man is obliged to explain his motives to an impertinent public; and it is to be feared, that, should the Public be impertinent to him, our friend, on his return from Lapland, may refuse to show the MS. of his Ballad to proper judges, or to authenticate by proper witnesses, where and by what means he acquired it. But the editor pledges himself thus far to the Public, that, if he is able to put the MS. into Mr. Bew's hands, he undertakes to teach Mr. Bew the ancient character in a few days, by which he will be fully enabled to see, with his own eyes, that the printed copy is genuine And thus we shall escape the lamentable though laughable blunder which Mr. Beckett fell into, when, on the publication of Johnson's Tour, he assured the Public, in an advertisement in the papers, that the MSS. of Ossian, in the original tongue, had been there three months in his possession;—whereas we all know that Mr. Beckett knew not a word of Erse, and that therefore the MSS. left in his possession might have been a parcel of Highland leaves, for anything that he could know either pro or con. The lovers of old poetry newly discovered must, therefore, be pleased to note with what precaution we intend to avoid the like ridiculous situation.

No matter how great the crowd of carping critics who may doubt the antiquity of the ballad of Queen Emma, "the learned defenders of Rowley must not be of the number. And even the learned Dr. Millne and the ingenious Mr. Bryant must own that our Ballad contains one intrinsic mark of Antiquity in a higher degree than the poems of Rowley: it does not contain one line, half-line, scrap or illusion from or to Mr. Pope, or any other modern poets!"

A particularly pointed dart at the ways of the ballad tinkers and of the reproducers of "Northern Literature" is this passage:—

But as the Editor has hitherto acted with the utmost candor, he cannot conceal a certain circumstance, which has staggered even himself; not indeed, as to the authenticity of the MS. for that he saw and was judge of; but of a certain part of his Lapland friend's conduct. The case is this: He perfectly well remembers that, when he first saw the MS. of Queen Emma, the first five or six stanzas were totally different from those now published according to his friend's last copy. Now, what shall we say to this? Why, truly, it would be a hard matter to account for it, did not the case of Fingal help us out at this dead lift. True it is, that about the year 1758, was published, by Hamilton and Balfour, at Edinburgh, a shilling octave pamphlet, containing Mr. MacPherson's first specimens of his fragments of Erse poetry, the preface to which proposed his travelling in the Highlands, if enabled to do so, for the recovery of several others, particularly an epic poem named Fingal, the beginning of which was the concluding specimen of the pamphlet. But this opening, and a large portion it was, is no more like the opening of the first book of Fingal afterwards published by the same Translator, than one of Robin Hood's songs is like that of Chevy Chase. Several years ago the Editor mentioned this seemingly strange circumstance to a learned Scottish Antiquarian, who very easily and satisfactorily accounted for it in this manner: "Among the various copies of Ossian, said he, which the learned Translator found in the Highlands, some were more perfect than others, and from the most perfect the complete edition has been given." Now, as the old proverb says, *what is sauce for a goose is sauce for a gander*; so this vindication is applicable to our Ballad: and our friend, having found more perfect copies of his MS. in Lapland than that found in Durham, in justice and due deference to the Public, has presented them with the foregoing, as not only the best, but the most genuine copy of the ancient Prophecy of Queen Emma.

The modern editor of Chatterton, the Reverend Professor W. W. Skeat, generously acknowledges that the books most powerfully contributing to the settlement of the Chatterton

controversy are the pamphlets that appeared in the year 1782. It is Thomas Warton's "Enquiry" and Tyrwhitt's "Vindication," however, that he has in mind. Credit for the final disposition of the Ossian question is generally given to the report of the Highland Society of London, published in 1807. As an agent in dismissing the claims of forgers of false notes of hand in the parish of Parnassus, Mickle's pamphlet has received scant notice. The effect it had in its own day is not recorded. It undoubtedly ran a great risk of being taken seriously,—the divining rod of good burlesque. I am glad to confess that I read the ballad and some fifteen pages of the "Postscript" in the firm belief that the writer was serious in his intention, while I was of the opinion that of all the publishers of old poetry newly discovered he was the least skilful and most quackish in counterfeiting antiquity. It is that pleasing sort of burlesque which makes you violently angry with the writer for daring to assume that you are so gullible as to gulp down his bungling swindle.

J. F. ROYSTER.

The University of North Carolina.